

Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

Reserve
aGV199
.6
.S74
1990

**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

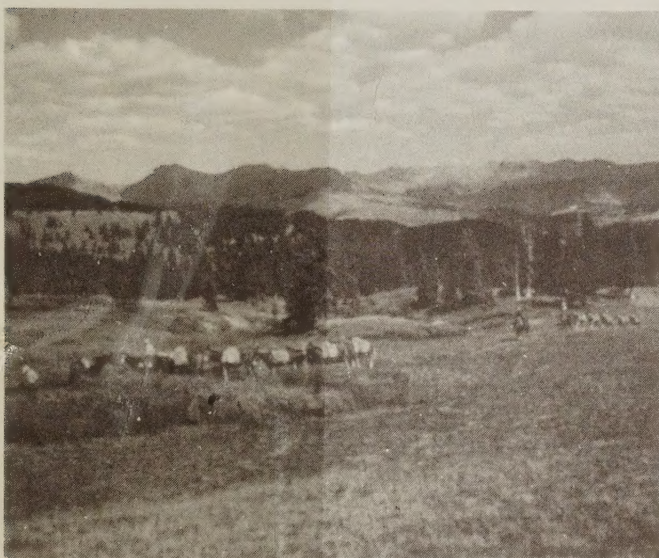


National Agricultural Library

ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

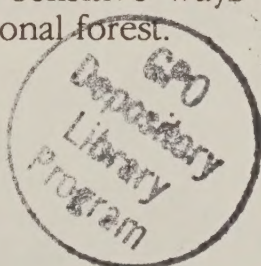


SPECIALTY PACK STRING



Pack strings are valuable tools in managing the 191 million acres which make up the national forest, America's Great Outdoors. These lands were set aside over 100 years ago to provide for the needs of the American people in ways that also protect the environment. In addition to packing supplies and equipment into remote backcountry, the Rocky Mountain Region Specialty Pack String makes public appearances to promote environmentally sensitive ways to use livestock in the national forest.

24 JUN 1993



U.S.D.A. FOREST SERVICE

23 JUN 1993

REGION 2, ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

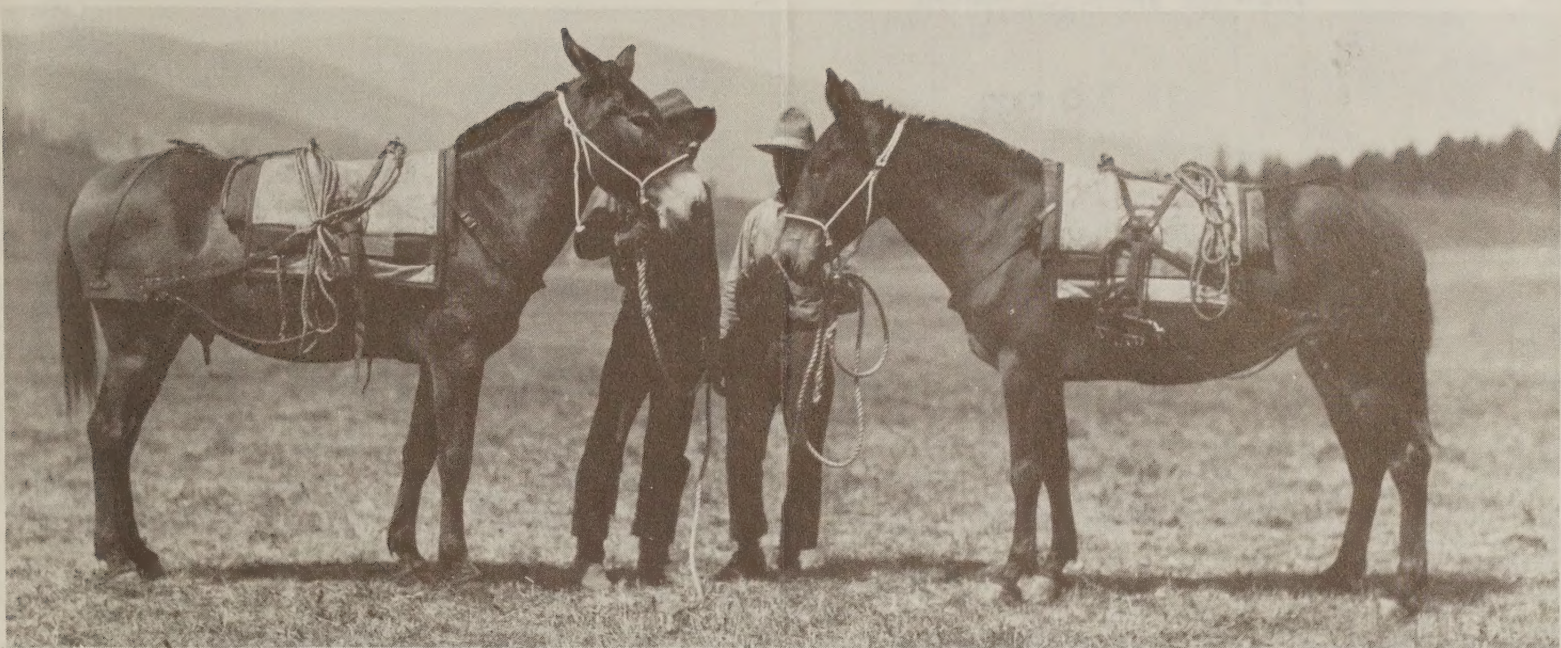


MULES IN THE FOREST SERVICE

Cowboys, trappers, and woodsmen—outdoorsmen of every variety—filled the early forest ranger ranks. A good pack animal was an equal partner in protecting the reserves from timber, theft, and fire. Often, that animal was a mule. Mules were preferred because they possess intelligence, agility, and stamina. It was only a matter of time before several pack mules were tied together, creating a working pack string. These working strings became lifelines to the crews who fought fires, carved trails, built firetowers, and bridged rivers in the backcountry. The vast accomplishments of the Civilian Conservation Corps could not have been achieved without the help of mule pack strings.

Able to carry roughly 20 percent of its body weight, a 1200-pound mule can comfortably carry about 240 pounds. Since nine mules and a horse form a standard Forest Service pack string, the working payload is about one ton. Given this capacity, the best use of mules today is packing supplies into and out of the wilderness where mechanized equipment is not allowed.

*Vintage Photographs Courtesy of
Ninemile Remount Depot
Huson, Montana*



START WITH A GOOD MULE

Mules are the hybrid product of a male donkey and a female horse. Male mules are called johns and female mules are called mollies. Our beautiful mollies are a cross between male donkeys and Belgium horse mares. This pack string uses mollies because they generally have a more gentle disposition than johns.

Intelligence, agility, and stamina are all characteristics of mules. These qualities combine with a quirk of nature to make mules excellent pack animals. Unlike horses, who carry about 65 percent of their weight on their front legs, mules carry 55 percent on their front legs. This makes them very well balanced and surefooted, just what you want on backcountry trails!

Some people think stubbornness is a mule characteristic... stubborn as a mule! Mules are intelligent and possess a strong sense of self-preservation. You just can't make a mule do something it thinks will hurt it, no matter how much persuasion you use. So, some people confuse this trait with stubbornness. What do you think?

Mules form close bonds with horses, especially mares. The bond is so close that mules willingly follow a mare. That is why you usually find a mare—wearing a bell—leading a string of mules. A wrangler, or mule Skinner, can usually control an entire pack string simply by controlling the bell mare. At night in the backcountry mule skinkers can picket the bell mare and turn the mules loose. The mules will disperse and graze freely yet remain close to the mare. Environmental impacts are reduced and the mules are easy to gather in the morning.

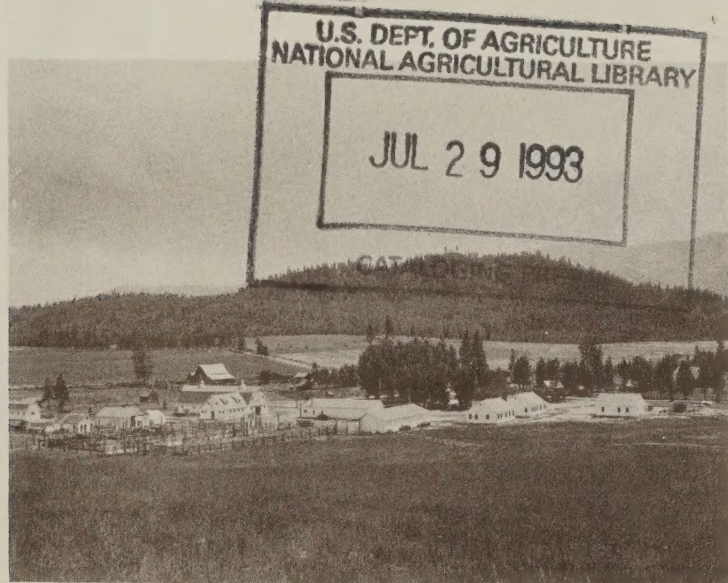
PACKING A MULE STRING

The Rocky Mountain Region Specialty Pack String features 11 highly trained pack animals and 3 saddle horses, along with their equipment and tack. Three mule skinkers accompany the string to shoe, pack, lead, and care for the livestock.

Routine equipment for the string starts with packsaddles. The Forest Service uses the Decker model, popular since the 1930's. Each mule's saddle is custom fitted to its back. Next are different size bags that attach to saddles. Extra large bags, called panniers, haul big loads of food or equipment. Finally, there are plenty of ropes for hitching everything together. In fact, making loads secure with rope hitches is a skill that approaches art. Packers and mule skinkers take great pride in their ability to "throw" nearly a dozen standardized hitches.

Backcountry projects often call for specialty equipment to move materials. Bottom-dump aluminum panniers haul gravel, concrete, and sand. Insulated aluminum panniers pack ice or food. These panniers are "bearproof", especially important in grizzly country. Lumber bunks allow a mule to pack bridge timbers and posts up to 14 feet in length. For longer timbers, overhead swivel bunks are used to tandem pack loads between two mules.

With all this equipment, what can the pack string do? Haul fish for stocking in remote streams and high country lakes. Pack gravel or sand for trail maintenance and reconstruction. Load timbers and even windows to maintain fire lookouts. Carry out all kinds of unnatural junk—airplanes, cars, equipment, and scrap—out of wild and natural places.



1930 - Ninemile Remount Depot Established

In 1929, fire surged across the Northern Rockies, licking at firefighter's heels. Every able-bodied mule and pack horse was drafted into service to meet the cries for supplies. From the ashes of the '29 fires, the Ninemile Remount Depot was born in Montana. Like cavalry remount depots, which provided fresh mounts for horse soldiers, Ninemile provided horses and mules to meet Forest Service needs. For a generation, Ninemile ran up to 20 packtrains in support of remote fire and construction efforts.

1964 - National Wilderness Preservation Act

"To secure for the American people of present and future generations for the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness."

"A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is an area where man is a visitor who does not remain and outstanding opportunities for solitude are provided!"

"...The earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man."

"...A primeval character and influence prevail, and the land is primarily affected by the forces of nature."

1990 - AG Ranch & the Legacy of Ninemile Remount

Though the Ninemile Remount Depot closed in 1953, the traditions and spirit endure today at the AG Ranch, located west of Denver, Colorado. Horses and mules based out of this station still ply trails and teach lessons on horsemanship, packing, and low impact techniques for backcountry use. The Rocky Mountain Specialty Pack String provides specialty packing and educational outreach throughout the Rocky Mountain Region. In addition, plans for additions to the AG Ranch include a natural resource conservation education center where Front Range students can bridge the ways of the past with the path to the future.



LEAVE NO TRACE!

One of the most important tips for backcountry visitors is to be courteous to others. Everyone will enjoy their outdoor experience more. Courtesy works well with the **Leave No Trace!** ethic...make it hard for others to see or hear you, and leave no trace of your visit!

Many people enjoy animal packing in the backcountry. Pack stock groups must be more careful about **Leaving No Trace!** than others, because animals—when improperly used—can have a greater impact. Proper planning, with special attention to camp location and confining animals in camp, is important.

Planning: Check to be sure stock are allowed and what trail conditions are like. Some areas are closed to stock during part or all of the year. Keep your group small and carry lightweight equipment to reduce the number of livestock needed.

Setting up camp: Consider your stock. A campsite should accommodate your animals without any damage to the area. If you plan to graze your stock, remember to leave ample food for the resident wildlife. Pick a watering area that can withstand hard use downstream from camp. Stay away from lakeshores and soft meadows.

Confining stock: Hitchlines need to be in rocky areas and on good stout trees. Protect bark by using straps or "tree savers." Picket with metal pins only enough stock to keep others from straying.

Feed: Bring pellets, grain, or weed-free hay to areas where feed is limited or grazing is not allowed. Stakes, picket pins, and temporary corrals should be moved frequently to prevent overgrazing.

Breaking camp: It takes extra time to naturalize an area that has been impacted by pack animals. Scatter manure piles, fill areas dug up by animal hooves, and remove excess hay and straw.



NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL LIBRARY



1022349700

NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL LIBRARY



1022349700